



BOOK REVIEWS

EDITORS

VALENTINA TEMUSSI

MARIA JOÃO BRILHANTE

MILIJAJA GLUHOVIĆ

ARMANDO ROTONDI

**THÉÂTRON
VERSO UNA MEDILOGIA
DEL TEATRO E DELLA
PERFORMANCE**

**THEÁTRON
TOWARDS A MEDIOLGY OF
THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE**

VINCENZO DEL GAUDIO

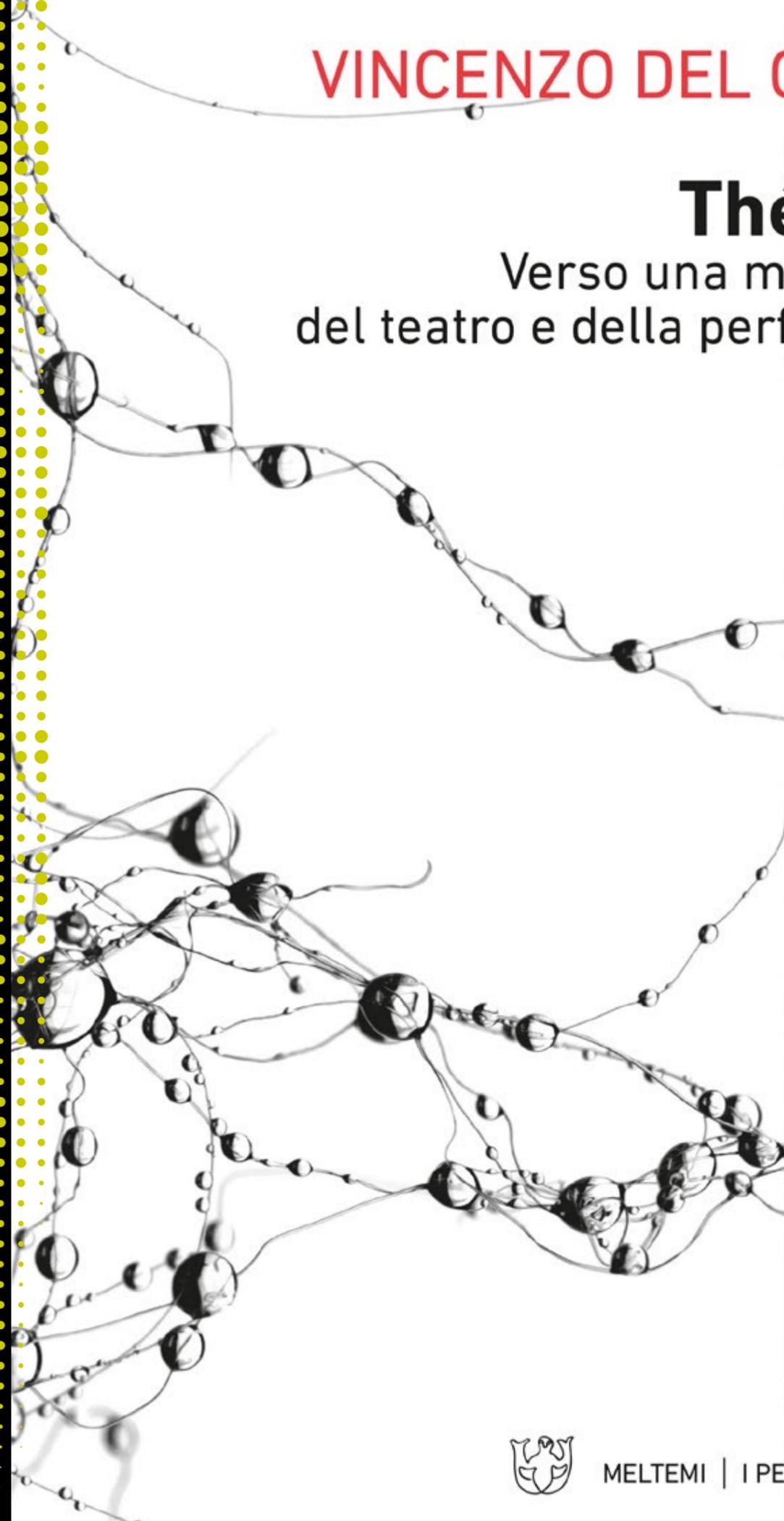
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**review by
ARMANDO ROTONDI**

Institute of the Arts Barcelona, Spain

VINCENZO DEL GAUDIO

Théatron
Verso una mediologia
del teatro e della performance



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Without

any doubt, within the wider context of performing arts studies in Italy, Vincenzo Del Gaudio can be ascribed to that group of scholars of reference in the field of theatre, new media, and digital. It is a group that also includes, but is not limited to, figures such as Antonio Pizzo, Fabrizio Deriu, Alfonso Amendola, Annamaria Monteverdi, and others. A sociologist by education, but with a clear interest and expertise in the field of performing arts, Del Gaudio has long been engaged in the investigation of theatre as a medium in relation to other media. This was already evident in the previous volume by Del Gaudio, edited together with the afore-mentioned Alfonso Amendola, *Teatro e immaginari digitali: Saggi di mediologia dello spettacolo multimediale (Theatre and Digital Imageries: Essays on Multimedia Performance Medi-ology, 2018)*. In this collective publication, the attention of the editors was focused on the semantic plexus that holds the theatre together with the new digital media, investigating the topic according to two parallel and complementary trajectories of research: a media-archaeological perspective and a sociological one.

In the following *Théatron: Verso una mediologia del teatro e della performance (Theátron: Towards a Mediology of Theatre and Performance, Meltemi 2020)*, authored solely by Del Gaudio, the author proceeds in a similar way, certainly considering the media-archaeological and sociological element, but broadening his analysis. He questions specific points that represent the different cores of the book. First, in the long and reasoned introduction, Del Gaudio looks — in a sort of crescendo — at the relationships between theatre and mediology, then at those between theatre, sociology, and mediology, and finally at the possible interaction between sociology and mediology of digital theatre. It is a precise investigation that builds step by step by addition of a necessary

literature review that — from Georg Simmel, György Lukács, and Walter Benjamin — arrives, through Schechner and others, to today, considering and overcoming some of the seminal studies on the relationship between theatre and mediology. This includes the works on the German *Medienphilosophie*, as variously proposed and investigated by Friedrich Kittler, Deiter Teichert or by Mike Sandbothe and Ludwig Nagl. The approach is multidisciplinary and it could not be otherwise: philosophy, mediology, sociology, and purely theatrical studies intersect and create a necessary dialectic. And it is in this context that the theoretical works by Alberto Abruzzese, for example, go parallelly with those by Raymond Williams.

In the next section, Chapter I, Del Gaudio carefully observes ‘theater as a medium’ phenomenon, tracing a path that takes into account the thoughts of Simmel, Ortega y Gasset, Benjamin and, of course, Marshall McLuhan. In this specific section, the work is highly theoretical and Del Gaudio does not yet consider specific case studies in theatre, but he successfully tries to give those tools in order to then understand those theatre productions that will be investigated in the following chapters. Thus, for example, he summarises three intuitions of Ortega y Gasset on the theatre: 1. as a space of continuous remediation; 2. on how the stage device produces images that are in continuity with other media forms; 3. finally, considering that the theatre has the logical structure of the metaphor as its operative basis.

From Chapter II, ‘Verso una mediologia del teatro (digitale)’, Del Gaudio’s analysis becomes more practically specific from the beginning, and it is aimed at case studies and examples that can now be read through the frameworks previously given. This is clear from the very *incipit* of the chapter, in which the author immediately dwells on Robert Lepage’s work, *Les aiguilles et l’opium (Needles and Opium)*, to introduce the discourse on intermedial dramaturgy and how dramaturgy is at the centre

of many debates on intermediality. From this point on, there are many artists and productions taken into consideration, both from Italy and internationally. Just to name a few artists and titles: *Underground: Roberta nel metrò* (*Underground: Roberta in the metro*, 2019) by Cuocolo-Bosetti company or, in the part dedicated to ‘Remediation’ and ‘Radical mediation’, to the works with androids by Hirata Oriza and the Seinendan Theater Company, or, later on in the book, the productions by Romeo Castellucci, Thomas Ostermeier, Nicola Vicidomini, The Blast Theory, and others. With the same great number of details, examples, and theory, Del Gaudio focuses, in the fourth chapter, on ‘liveness’, first of all outlining its forms, concept, and parameters. Similarly, there are here many case studies and, if only few criticisms may be made of the volume, on the issue of the spectatorial/audience experience the approach could have widened even more by taking into consideration elements of experiential marketing — I think, for example, to the realms of experience — which can tell us so much about theatre experience, albeit it is as an approach that comes from the world of economics. In the last chapter, media archeology returns, almost at the end of a discourse that, in a circular manner, Del Gaudio had already begun elsewhere.

Finally, *Théatron: Verso una mediologia del teatro e della performance* is an important, dense, and intense volume, with a very broad but clear theoretical framework — also accompanied by an excellent bibliography — and a reading of several theatrical cases. On this last point, it is possible to make a second small criticism in wishing for a more complete teatrography at the end of the book. In any case, it is certainly an essential work in the Italian debate on theatre and new media. ●

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POPULAR MUSIC THEATRE UNDER SOCIALISM OPRETTAS AND MUSICALS IN THE EASTERN EUROPEAN STATES 1945 TO 1990

WOLFGANG JANSEN (ed.)

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review by

NICK HOLLAMBY

Institute of the Arts Barcelona, Spain



Wolfgang Jansen (Ed.)

Popular Music Theatre under Socialism

Operettas and Musicals
in the Eastern European States
1945 to 1990

POPULÄRE KULTUR UND MUSIK

30

WAXMANN

In 2017, nearly thirty years after The Cold War, leading theatre historian Dr. Wolfgang Jansen met with a number of colleagues to present at a symposium entitled 'Popular Music Theatre under Socialism: Operettas and Musicals in the Eastern European States 1945 to 1990'. Prior to the rise of communism, Eastern European states were known for producing some of the greatest music theatre of the modern age but little was known about the development of operettas and musicals that took place within the Eastern Bloc between 1945 and 1990. The symposium set out to address the lacuna in the research. Taking its name directly from the symposium, *Popular Music Theatre under Socialism* documents and collates the contributions, discussions, and findings from this event. Divided into autonomous sections, the volume highlights six European States under investigation: Soviet Union, Hungary, German Democratic Republic (GDR), Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Rumania (Romania). The fourteen prominent researchers who contributed to this body of work offer broad historical discussions juxtaposed with unique case studies of productions and works within their corresponding state.

The volume provides a captivating insight into a period of political appropriation where operettas and music theatre were very much created under the social and ideological conditions of the Eastern European Countries. During the period, 'Governments standardized and institutionalized all performing arts (vaudeville genres like puppet theatres, folk dancing, etc.) across Eastern Europe' (p. 23), recognising 'theatre

as a particularly important medium for positive social changes' (p. 19). Despite the thematic exploration of transnational ideology, each section highlights unique distinctions (aesthetic, compositional, etc.) of the respective state. Whilst references to Marxist-Leninist state doctrines were obvious across the majority of states, the research into the influence of the capitalist West and the development of musical theatre, particularly in the GDR, is fascinating. Despite the threat of 'dangerous cosmopolitanism and the pernicious American influence' (p. 210), composers and producers from Eastern European states began to reflect or even import productions from America and the Western Bloc. This progressive shift would lead to an estrangement from the Eastern European sound in favour of those from the West. Contributor and editor, Dr. Wolfgang Jansen, examines this development perfectly in his epilogue:

It became apparent that there was an enormous pent-up demand for American musicals. As early as the first half of 1990, *My Fair Lady* alone saw twenty new productions, not to mention revivals. [...] Comecon dissolved, the economic infrastructures, also in theatre life, collapsed, the formerly state-owned publishing houses were privatized, new contracts had to be concluded with the authors of the stage works all over, and the previously comparatively inexpensive works from Eastern Europe had to be paid for on terms similar to those of the Western titles. The international nature of the repertoire collapsed as well. The theatres sought to assimilate very quickly to the conditions in Western Germany. [...] Since then, new musicals from Eastern Europe have become an exception on the German stages. (p. 163)

Popular Music Theatre under Socialism represents a milestone in Eastern European studies of popular music theatre. It celebrates the research of an expert group of academics who share a passion for scholarly and professional engagement with Eastern European theatre history. Each contributor has managed to source reviews, musical excerpts, pic-

tures, and news articles that supplement and support the research perfectly. The research itself has been investigated through both academic and editorial sources which are provided in the footnotes of each section. What is particularly noteworthy and markedly the first of its kind is the 'Show Index' which collates hundreds of productions that took place during the forty-five-year socialist period.

Whilst there is no denying that the content and subject matter of this publication is dense and contains numerous typographical errors, there is little to criticise. This is an important publication, not only because it highlights a period of theatre history that has remained shrouded in obscurity, but also because it provides fascinating cultural context to a forty-five-year period that shaped and continues to influence modern history. The wider impact that this volume will have on European musicology and Eastern Europe's music theatre identity should be celebrated. ●

THE METHUEN DRAMA HANDBOOK OF INTERCULTURALISM AND PERFORMANCE

DAPHNE P. LEI, CHARLOTTE McIVOR (eds.)

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review by

AMEET PARAMESWARAN

Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India



THE METHUEN DRAMA HANDBOOK OF INTERCULTURALISM AND PERFORMANCE

EDITED BY DAPHNE P. LEI & CHARLOTTE MCIVOR

The Methuen *Drama Handbook of Interculturalism and*

Performance, co-edited by Daphne P. Lei and Charlotte McIvor foregrounds the necessity of engaging in the contemporary period with the productive and much contested intercultural practice and theory. Approaching interculturalism as an 'unstable and turbulent process' (p. 3), the anthology's key strength is its horizontal span with analytical engagement of a wide array of performance practices ranging from theatre (popular and otherwise), dance, performance art interventions, and puppetry, from diverging geographies, through the lens of interculturalism. Terming these practices as 'minoritarian' tendencies, the 'unseen/unheard/unspoken/unfelt territories' (p. 2), Lei argues that interculturalism could be understood through the ecological metaphor of 'movements of the ocean' and that it is a conscious attempt at 'modelling a new oceanic ecosystem' of interculturalism 'worked out over time from below' (p. 3).

The anthology is organised in four Parts, each part framed by the editors through a larger thematic concern. Part One with essays by Marcus Tan, Arnab Banerji, and Emily Sahakian offers a critical re-evaluation of 'Hegemonic Intercultural Theatre' while Part Two, consisting of essays by Bi-qi Beatrice Lei, Diana Looser, and Roaa Ali, in differing ways, attempts to move beyond the assumed centrality of West in defining intercultural encounters. Part Three with the essays of Jennifer Goodlander, Angeline Young, and Sansan Kwan problematises complexities of intercultural collaboration in the contemporary, centring subjective experiences in manifold ways, while Part Four, through the essays of

Ketu Katrak, Lisa Jackson-Schebetta, and Min Tian, brings into ambit the challenges and possible limits of the current theoretical discourse of interculturalism from different perspectives. Although there is a big corpus of academic scholarship on interculturalism, essays in the volume critically engage with the widely differing scholarship on interculturalism that has come out in the last two decades, especially the works by Ric Knowles (2010), Erika Fischer-Lichte (2014), Leo Cabranes Grant (2016), Royona Mitra (2015), and the editors' own previous individual works (Lei, 2011; McIvor 2016). Problematising identifications articulated on the basis of territorially bounded conceptions and staticity, the essays foreground processes of interculturalism that are always and already at work in the society. For instance, Diana Looser, drawing on Cabranes-Grant, highlights that 'hybridity is a source of the intercultural' (p. 79), and, in the case of the understudied indigenous Pacific cultures, that 'roots lead back to routes and forward into routes again' (p. 78).

While there have been arguments that the term intercultural needs to be replaced (Bharucha 1992; Fischer-Lichte 2014), the editors re-situate the potentialities of the term by offering a mapping of existing intercultural theory in three waves. The chapter 'Annotated Bibliography', written by McIvor and Justine Nakase, terms them as the first wave of 'Emergence and Backlash' in the 1970s to 1990s (preceded by 'Winds', the wide range of modernist experimentations), the second wave of 'Consolidation', and the third wave of 'Other Interculturalism' in the last decade. The editors need to be credited for their openness because even as they themselves place the present anthology in the third wave, it does also stir up 'the sediments of both old and new debates' (McIvor 2020: 255) rather than simply settling them. Further, even as the editors themselves argue in support of a third wave of intercultural theory that according to them has an affirmative political value, the anthology resists offering a singular perspective, with some essays even offering challenges and counter-points to the editors' definition of interculturalism.

Lei clarifies that ‘time is both forward-moving and repetitive, governed by regulative rhythms but also yielding surprises’ (p. 9), and McIvor in the ‘Conclusion’ self-critically notes the possible centrality of ‘Global north/Western academy’ in defining even this discourse of interculturalism. Yet, thinking from a site such as India, one wonders whether the overarching frame of ‘progressive’ waves of theory in fact impedes conceptualisation of interculturalism in differing spatio-temporalities in their historical valences. These essays indeed highlight the unresolved tensions of ascribing foundational moments as well as imagining a space outside of the West. Min Tian’s essay in the volume extends his earlier critique of interculturalism by critically analysing the theoretical armature of what is seen as the new (wave of) interculturalism, foregrounding how it is ‘haunted’ by the old. Critiquing the ‘utopian dimension’ in theorising new interculturalism, Tian considers these intercultural practices, at best, an inversion of Western hegemony without fundamentally transforming the ‘mechanism of intercultural displacement’ (p. 194). Marcus Tan takes forward his earlier work on sonic interculturalism by focussing on Peter Brook’s latest production *The Battlefield* (2015) to highlight the issue of displacement in the process of adaptation. While *The Battlefield* is a short seventy-minute performance based on the epic Mahabharata, Tan forcefully argues that it can only be seen in its relation to the earlier production *The Mahabharata* and is ‘a means of monumentalizing memory and search for reputational immortality’ by Peter Brook (p. 24). Tan isolates specificity of accents and rhythms in *The Battlefield*, stressing how a careful listening reveals the reified and contradictory status of the claims of universality made by the intercultural performance. Thereby, Tan challenges the post-identitarian claims as well as affirmatory perspective of ‘interweaving performance cultures’ arguing that it ‘does little to engage with the materialities of race (and culture) as received, perceived, and *heard* by spectators’ (p. 16). Tan’s analysis also raises the unresolved methodological problem of how to mark the (authentic) source in the case of an intercultural adaptation.

For instance, this manifests in his analysis of the special space accorded to Sanskrit language as the source to which the adaptation can be compared, highlighting how sound, meaning, and energy are intrinsically connected in Sanskrit. Yet this irrevocable linkage of Mahabharata to Sanskrit and claims of Sanskrit as being ‘divine’, “‘elevated”, spiritual’ (p. 20) overlooks the basis of such claims in hegemonic Brahminist discourse. Arnab Banerji, on the other hand, foregrounds appropriation of the West from the space of India by analysing the conceptualisation of Third Theatre (one that desired to fuse the rural and the urban) by the iconic Bengali playwright and director Badal Sircar. While Sircar is often treated as a prominent figure in history of political theatre in India, Banerji focuses on Sircar’s intercultural connections, especially associations with Richard Schechner, Judith Malina, and Julian Beck, arguing that the inspiration of Third Theatre is in fact similar to ‘Western quest for the pure or universal’ (p. 52) and that Sircar’s disconnect from the rural India made his intervention ineffectual. Sircar’s practices and ideas, especially plays such as *Spartacus* based on Howard Fast’s novel or writings on political theatre, have had a wide circulation as part of radical political practice and imagination in different parts of India, and the lens of interculturalism indeed is an important one to complicate and possibly de-iconise Sircar. Banerji does indicate a longer history of theatrical exchanges implicated in the vibrant practices of the Indian People’s Theatre Association. Yet, the history and complexity of the theatrical/performance exchanges based on internationalism of Left is unfortunately completely elided in the author’s analysis with the polemical and unsubstantiated statement that ‘IPTA brand of theatre was essentially a foreign import repackaged for consumption in India’ (p. 48). Emily Sahakian, brings in another perspective by focussing on Maryse Condé’s performative engagement in the play *An tan revolisyon (In the Time of Revolution: 1989)* with Ariane Mnouchkine’s *1789*, opening out the possibility of re-evaluation of both the women artists beyond what she calls the constructed binary

of 'postcolonial-intercultural' (p. 39). Sahakian brings into view interculturalism through the effect of 'creolization' that challenges the normative history and conceptualisation of both interculturalism as well as revolution. One could see a similar problematisation of interculturalism in its relation to other discourses in the essays of Roaa Ali and Lisa Jackson-Schebetta. Highlighting interlinked discourses of power, Ali posits the intercultural as an idea and practice that foregrounds contestations in opposition to the state-driven discourse of multiculturalism, while Jackson-Schebetta marks the potentiality of *interculturalidad* in opposition to the normative category of interculturalism espoused by the European Union, where *interculturalidad* is fuelled by 'restorative justice' (p. 210).

The book is an essential read for research on interculturalism as it maps the emergent scholarship as well under-explored practices and sites of interculturalism in the contemporary. The reader is able to not only engage with these distinct perspectives in their specificities but the book invites readers to place them as conversation with each other. •

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PERFORMANCES DO TEMPO ESPIRALAR POÉTICAS DO CORPO-TELA

PERFORMANCES OF SPIRAL TIME
POETICS OF THE BODY-SCREEN

LEDA MARIA MARTINS

Rio de Janeiro: Cobogó, 2021, 254 pp.

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review by

SÍLVIA FERNANDES

Department of Performing Arts, University of São Paulo, Brazil

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Performances

do

poéticas do corpo-tela

Leda Maria Martins



The poet

and essayist Leda Maria Martins, Professor of art and literature at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, is a standard in thinking on performance, race, and colonialism in Brazil. In her doctoral research at the University of California, Berkeley, she came into contact with North American performance studies. She later met Diana Taylor and Richard Schechner, from New York University, with whom she established a fruitful dialogue that continues to this day.

Dedicating herself to the study of cultural performance in the field defined by these scholars, in her work she redimensions the dances, songs, and performative rituals of the Afro-Brazilian tradition in an approach that is not only theoretical but also living. Leda is an activist for the civil rights of black populations and was trained in an artistic environment of music, songs, dance, and oral narratives. She permeates her conceptual definitions with figures of speech that expand thinking on the various performative manifestations of Afro-descendant cultures, a special focus of *Performances do tempo espiralar*.

In the technique of the composition of the book, 'the hyperbolic turn of the word' and the 'paradigm of excess' (p. 101) explain the hybrid cultural mixture behind this original thinker of Afro-Brazilian culture. In addition to bringing the metaphorical resonance of the concepts presented, these ideas on occasions open out to certain linguistic twists which may divert the reader from the subject addressed. And here the spiral of time that is the theme of the work also appears.

The core idea of the study is that temporality and experience are not expressed only in the discursive dimension but also in the living body in which immemorial knowledge is imprinted and is made explicit in gesture, movement, choreography, skin surface, and vocality.

In line with the arguments of Diana Taylor (2003) and Rebecca Schneider (2011), Leda Martins observes that the network of knowledge passed on in the script of the body and the orality of the African subject contrasts with the writing of the coloniser, which works as a power strategy aimed at excluding and dominating colonised peoples. The legitimation of the domain of writing was the fundamental instrument of Eurocentric thinking to disqualify the epistemic and mnemonic systems that favoured performance as a way of fixing and expanding epistemological, historical, and sensorial repertoires.

Leda Martins develops and diversifies the theme in seven chapters/compositions complemented by a final synthesis, in which, aided by original concepts, she analyses black cultural performances. Operating notions such as crossroads, *oralitura* (*oraliture*), body-screen and, especially, spiral time, deepen the mapping of Afro-descendant cultural practices, which are considered embodied worldviews and reserves of memory.

One of the key concepts is that of spiralling time, which is associated with the memorial corporeality experienced in movements that challenge the temporal linearity which is characteristic of Eurocentric thinking. Allowing for reversibility, dilation, discontinuity, and the simultaneous presence of past, present, and future, this curved temporality is analysed by African philosophies such as the Congolese Bunseki Fu-Kiau, rarely cited by Western theorists. Also present in myths and poetry, this concept is materialised in forward and backward procedures which embody a dynamic circuit of memory, made possible by the transit between multiple temporalities.

Always referring to the perception of the African world, Leda Martins states that spiralling time is the privileged space of the ancestors. According to this conception, they do not die but rather survive in a transcendent dimension and take part in the broad family lineage that brings together the African and their descendants in communities of belonging and mutual help. The ancestors return in the performances of Candomblé centres, called 'terreiros', and in the various festivities and songs that function as ways of making African memory present in Brazilian territory. Some funeral rites such as the *Descorção dos Reinados* (*Decoronation of the Reigns*), for example, are fundamental stages in the transformation of the predecessor into an ancestor and preferred ways of transferring vital energy to the collectivity. Thus, in the spiral of memory, in the beating of the drums, and the rhythm of the feet firmly planted on the earth, 'the divinities, the ancestors and the driving forces gravitate' (p. 91).

In this line of argument, Martins emphasises that Afro-descendant cultural modes challenge Western memory devices, such as books, writings, and musical scores. She recalls that they favour other forms of mnemonic preservation, which are completed in voice and corporeality. In order to describe them, she elaborates the concept of *oralitura* (*oraliture*), which encompasses a complex texture of oral and bodily performances able to project cosmic visions. Knowledge is transmitted and recreated in memory environments made up of mnemonic reserves that magnetise the body with sounds, vocals, gestures, and scripts which can transform it into a screen-body, which can transmit repertoires and bring together memories. Ritual performances such as Congado, Umbanda, Candomblé, and Capoeira are thus privileged places of memorial transmission, projecting true performative syntheses that make ancestral knowledge present.

This is the case of *Reinados* (*Reigns*), situated at the crossroads between Catholic religiosity and African theology, whose symbolic, liturgical,

and myth-poetic structure is intended to restore a cosmogonic plot in which African philosophical principles are reprocessed and inscribed in Brazilian ethnic and cultural formation. In one of the most interesting passages in the book, Martins recovers one of these narratives of origin, the rescue of the image of Nossa Senhora do Rosário, patron saint of the black race, from the waters of the sea. After several attempts by white masters to save the saint, it was the enslaved Blacks who managed to rescue her. The subversion of the social order that the narrative disseminates by reversing the position of power between whites and Blacks is evident, and this is undoubtedly a form of social and cultural resistance that foreshadows the revolts of the slaves and the formation of *quilombos*, settlements of runaway slaves, as from the seventeenth century in Brazil.

In her penultimate composition, Leda Martins addresses the dramaturgical and scenic practices of current Brazilian theatre produced by black collectives, playwrights, performers, and theatre directors, who stage various aspects of the historical experience of the Afro-descendant population. In fact, black theatre experiments have advanced in the contemporary Brazilian scene, especially in the last decade, and with them the high political voltage fuelled by the strong black movement for civil rights and against structural racism. Perhaps the wealth and breadth of the creations justify the impression that the author does not deepen the analysis, restricting herself to a panorama. And the limitations of this chapter make it difficult to delve deeper into complex theatrical performances such as those created by the theater company *Teatro dos Narradores* (*Narrators' Theatre*) or by playwright Grace Passô, just to give two examples. In any case, this book is a synthetic and necessary mapping of the diversity of manifestations of black collectives, which are undoubtedly beacons of Afro-Brazilian culture today. •

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CRUOR

JEAN-LUC NANCY

Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2021, 126 pp.
ISBN: 9 782718 610207 (paperback)

Jean-Luc Nancy

Cruor

review by
ALÍCIA RODRÍGUEZ CAMPI

Institute of the Arts Barcelona, Spain



Galilée

En *Cruor*,

Nancy vuelve al cuerpo, desde su crudeza, y al sentido corporal de nuestra existencia 'en-común'. En esta publicación póstuma (Nancy finaliza el texto días antes de su deceso) se despliega el pensamiento nancyiniano con alusiones a conceptos y obras anteriores. Esta publicación incluye 'Nostalgie du père', conferencia en el coloquio/webinar *Massenpsychologie* (2021) donde se desarrollan ideas expuestas en páginas previas.

Cruor parte del replanteamiento del sentido de cuerpo en *Corpus* (1992) donde el cuerpo en tanto que extensión se describe como 'ex-peausition', una exposición como espaciamento 'entre-les-corps' (p. 11). Esta vez, Nancy toma el vocablo 'cruor' del latín: mientras *sanguis* hace referencia a la sangre que circula, *cruor* refiere a la sangre que se derrama fuera y se coagula. Así mismo, Nancy retoma la pregunta sobre el 'cru' de Derrida en *Circonfession* (1991), un sentido de 'crudo' que presupone de algún modo la supresión de toda mediación, cierta forma o fuerza de rechazo a un 'entre'. Además, la sonoridad de 'cru' permite percibir cierta herida que toca lo más íntimo, lo más vivo, así como lo más muerto, como en la fluidez de la sangre, se da vida y muerte. 'Cruor' enfatiza, de este modo, lo crudo, la crudeza y la crueldad, el dentro-fuera desde un 'corps-à-corps', la relación en y desde la crudeza, la violencia, la corporalidad existencial expuesta, la vida y la muerte, 'la vie la mort' en alusión al seminario de Derrida donde se toma la muerte como posibilidad de vida y no como oposición a ésta (pp. 12, 95).

A través de la circulación sanguínea, de un latido cada vez nuevo, de un volver sobre sí que siempre es un 'todavía no ha tenido lugar', un dentro/fuera, una in/ex-piración con la que se da la circulación misma, Nancy ilustra nuestra existencia corporal como el devenir constante de un sinfín de interrelaciones, la vida junto la muerte, la pausa y la repetición, la intermitencia. Un cuerpo descrito desde el ritmo, los latidos y las pulsaciones, desde la repetición como un siempre nuevo, un empezar de nuevo a cada instante, pues 'la repetición hace un cuerpo' (p. 55). El cuerpo y nuestra existencia corporal como una insistencia en su expansión, un cuerpo que se forma, se repite, insiste, persiste, persevera. Y el cuerpo como unidad plural, singular pluralidad, en perpetuo cambio, transformación, transición, mutación.

La forma-cuerpo es la expansión, la exposición, dice Nancy, la piel que ofrece, se da, se abre y permite la permeabilidad de un afuera. Cuerpos respectivos y recíprocos. De este modo, plantea el concepto de una *matrix*, la posibilidad de transformación, el origen sin principio ni causa, expansión que siempre parece haber empezado, dado lugar. Expansión y exposición, afectación y permeabilidad, cuerpos que se dan, devienen y configuran en dinámica relación, en incesante redefinición.

Con influencias psicoanalíticas y referencias a las pulsiones freudianas, analiza el *Soi*, el *Toi*, el *Moi*, el *Soi* con relación a un *Ça* que siendo origen nunca tuvo origen, y al *Soi* con relación al *Soi/Même*. Y en esta reflexividad relacional, plantea el sentido de 'ex-citare' como un salir a comparecer, como la fuerza de abertura misma de un cuerpo, liberado de un afuera y expuesto a rencuentros.

La palabra y el lenguaje toma importancia en esta interrelación corpórea. Nancy nos habla del mito como palabra pronunciada, como pulsiones, palabras 'pulsivas', latentes, que se conjugan para componer nuestras relaciones, configurando un *cosmos* de valores, *cosmos* como disposición

receptiva de valores en-común. La sangre es el primer material de la ficción, y ‘la palabra es la sangre que circula entre los cuerpos, que toca e impulsa el ritmo, los latidos del otro’ (p. 62). El lenguaje a través de la poesía abre la posibilidad de sentido que no a la significación, pues el sentido viene dado como otro, como alteración en sí mismo.

También describe el sacrificio cuando la sangre se derrama fuera y *sanguis* deviene *cruor*, otra substancia. El sacrificio parte de la posibilidad de tomar a otro como yo-mismo o parte de mí. En el sacrificio se toma la sangre (vida y sentido) del otro como la propia, sintiendo así el palpito de la sangre original. El sacrificio como primera forma de comparación en comunidad.

Con la misma raíz que ‘cru’ y ‘cruor’, la crudeza y la crueldad son aquí relevantes. Se alude al amor cristiano que surge como reacción a un reino de violencia, pues la agresividad también es constitutiva al ser humano. Y frente a la crudeza, *ágape* como posibilidad de acogida, de coexistencia, espacio de ‘composibilidades’, y la *phillia* subyacente a la política griega como conjunción de *eros* y *cosmos*.

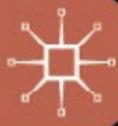
En *Cruor*, se vuelve a la idea del en-común, como aquello que configura nuestra existencia, que nos con-figura. Un ‘en-común’ que no señala el *zoon politikon* aristotélico, sino algo más esencial, nuestra existencia abocada al mundo, al otro, a la otredad; dada por, en y desde el otro. Nos plantea la configuración de un mundo, un *cosmos*, en-común. Un en-común que no refiere tampoco a lo que nos es común, como algo que podamos definir, sino a la relación que nos constituye, a la relación con el otro que nos con-figura y que con-figuramos a cada instante, a la relación como condición ontológica.

Un en-común corpóreo y lingüístico, de cuerpo y *logos*, *mythos* y *logos*, reencuentros donde emerge la posibilidad de sentido desde lo incierto

y lo improbable, y que a la vez evidencia nuestra insignificancia desde su crudeza, desde la crueldad, así como desde el *ágape*, *eros* y *thanatos*, y que enfatiza y visibiliza nuestra vulnerabilidad ontológica.

La vulnerabilidad subyace en todo el texto y filosofía nancyniana, y en el sentido de *cruauté*. La crudeza presupone un estado de abertura, la relación, la afectación y el en-común, y nos permite pensar nuestra condición existencial desde una corporalidad que en esta ocasión va más allá de la extensión como *ex-peuasition* y que considera la violencia, la destrucción, la muerte, y, en definitiva, la relación constitutiva y nuestra vulnerabilidad.

Nancy deja tras *Cruor* y su deceso, su pensamiento que lejos de agotarse sigue estimulando, cuestionando y replanteando el sentido de nuestra existencia colectiva desde lo en-común, desde nuestra corporalidad y vulnerabilidad ontológica; fuerza a una mirada crítica y política, a una reflexividad que escapa de categorizaciones, y que desde su planteamiento ontológico apunta a ámbitos políticos, éticos y estéticos. Pensar el cuerpo y la escena desde Nancy, es en sí mismo un ejercicio *político*. ●



**CHOREOGRAPHING
AGONISM
POLITICS, STRATEGIES AND
PERFORMANCES OF THE LEFT**

GORAN PETROVIĆ-LOTINA

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ISBN: 978-3-030-79445-3 (hardback)

review by
TOM DRAYTON
University of East London, UK



**Choreographing
Agonism**

Politics, Strategies and
Performances of the Left

Goran Petrović-Lotina

palgrave
macmillan

There's

a utopic ideal permeating Petrović-Lotina's *Choreographing Agonism* that is also belied by a fundamental pragmatism. Central to the volume is a belief that performance practices hold the power to challenge dominant, hegemonic politics and aid audience members — and therefore the public — in 'contest[ing] existing politics and contribute to the constitution of much more democratic forms of living together' (p. 2). Contrasting this idealism, however, is Petrović-Lotina's dissatisfaction with the (in)ability of performance studies as a theoretical field to have provided (so far) what he deems a satisfactory theoretical horizon for the intersection between politics and performance. This dissatisfaction then extends to the (in)ability for activist strategies of withdrawal (by which he means protest actions that stand in direct opposition to — and therefore outside of and not actively engaging with — institutions of power) to successfully implement and affect political change. Instead, Petrović-Lotina looks to contemporary performance art for ways of engaging proactively with institutions in order to successfully affect transformation.

Published by Palgrave Macmillan, *Choreographing Agonism* builds upon politico-philosophical debates around performance and activism, utilising the critical frameworks of agonism, post-Marxist discourse theory, conflict, and hegemony. Over nine chapters, Petrović-Lotina interweaves theories from a wide variety of philosophical and political scholars in a way that centres different forms of tension within a political and performative framework. His exploration of Chantal Mouffe

and Ernesto LaClau's understanding of agonism, for example, includes an advocacy for such discursive strategies to prevail over pre-existing strategies of antagonism in forms of protest. Similarly, he applies Jacques Rancière's understanding of the mutual dependency of art and politics to Antonio Gramsci's use of the term 'praxis' to mean a political struggle against capitalism through strategies of engagement to highlight how we can — and should — turn to performance to find new strategies of political encounter. To do this, he focuses on contemporary performance art in Western Europe, drawing a line between dance-like choreographic practices and what he sees as organisational choreography within the structure of protest movements.

In this sense, Petrović-Lotina's main argument is inspired by, and in constant conversation with, activist tactics and strategies of contesting institutions that enforce neoliberal hegemony. The outcome of this is an attempt to, as phrased by the author, (re)articulate new ways of living together — although who is living together or involved in such rearticulation (and therefore, who is excluded from such political process) is unclear. His overview of what he calls horizontally choreographed activist movements — activist groups that function without an overarching hierarchy, such as the global Occupy protest movement of 2011 — allows the reader to understand them as critical responses to what Petrović-Lotina sees as a recent crisis in representational democracy. However, he sees such activist strategies manifest as moments of withdrawal; when protestors oppose dominant institutions, they refuse to meaningfully engage with them, hence 'withdrawing' from a possible dialogue. He therefore critiques the efficacy of such movements, positing that protests such as the 2011 global Occupy movement or the 2016 French employment-law focussed movement *Nuit debout*, actually enabled a strengthening of global neoliberal policies. In effect, if one withdraws from a dialogue with certain institutions (with an intention to affect change) such institutions will continue their work unabated.

Throughout the first four chapters, Petrović-Lotina argues that it is through engagement, rather than through strategies of avoidance and rupture, that activism — and performance — can affect change, allowing ‘the protestors to confront, deconstruct and rearticulate a dominant political order from within and articulate it in an alternative way’ (p. 36).

With such a fertile ground for exploration within political theatre practice, however, Petrović-Lotina’s focus on how such strategies interact with performance practice is limited to a small number of examples of performance art chiefly shared across the repertoire of France-based Israeli choreographer Arkadi Zaides, Brussels-based Norwegian choreographer Mette Edvardsen, and the Berlin theatre company Rimini-Protokoll. Most of this discussion focuses on the work of choreographer Mette Edvardsen, including beautifully written descriptions of the performances that make up the artist’s trilogy of works *Black* (2011), *No Title* (2014), and *We to Be* (2015). Through detailing how Edvardsen develops a methodology over the course of these works that is focussed on compelling the audience to collectively (re)imagine presence through absence (and sometimes, as in the case of *We To Be* – in which Edvardsen reads a performance into being onto a blank stage from within the audience – collectively imagine whole productions), Petrović-Lotina develops an understanding of how the tension between presence and absence, and the dramatisation of symbolic actions, can affect the audience to (literally or imaginatively) see things differently.

Whilst Petrović-Lotina argues that all art contains a political dimension, it is unclear how these non-explicitly political examples can effectively and measurably aid in the ‘quest for the construction of an alternative order of politics’ (p. 150). The main question whilst reading Petrović-Lotina’s argument then becomes one of access and exclusion. Who, for instance, is accessing these works? What audience demographics are able to engage in the alternative thinking with Mette Edvardsen,

and what financial, access-driven, or class-based restrictions are in place that limit such inclusion? Additionally, what ‘tools’ do audiences already need in order to be able to fully (and critically) engage with such pieces in a meaningful way? If, as Petrović-Lotina argues, such work enables audiences to imagine alternative realities and, effectively, reconstruct politics, who is able to take part in, and who is excluded from, such reconstruction? The author advocates for actual, major strategic change in regard to how politically minded performance makers and activists engage with institutions of power. However, the mainly theoretical focus coupled with largely ‘high-brow’ examples that mostly exclude an overtly political stance limits both the application of this framework onto actual performance practice as well as the demographics included in an intended political restructuring.

However, in the final section of Chapter 9, Petrović-Lotina offers a tantalising glimpse towards how his argument can be used to understand more explicitly participatory and accessible political performance work when he applies the totality of his theoretical framework to German company Rimini Protokoll’s *100% City/Brussels* (2014). As Petrović-Lotina describes, through engaging with one hundred ‘real, ordinary people’ from Brussels as cast/participants within the creation and performance of the work, Rimini Protokoll illustrate the ‘eternal tension between the multitude of human associations’ (p. 159) by including one hundred people ‘on stage split into different groups in order to simulate different associations based on age, nationality, or neighbourhood’ (p. 159). This choreographic grouping extends to opinions offered by the participants about subjects as various as the EU to gay rights — with participants/performers reorganising their position onstage to reflect their opinion on the subject at hand. Importantly, Petrović-Lotina offers a particular insight in regards to how such a performance can illustrate alternative political outcomes, stating that when ‘those who decided not to vote [...] were asked to leave the stage, they were left to observe how the rest

[...] made decisions about issues that might have been of concern to them, too' (p. 159); a tangible and blunt example of how such performance practice can enable and encourage audiences (and participants in this case) to imagine alternative political engagement.

Choreographing Agonism is a unique and timely addition to the intersecting fields of politico-philosophical thought and performance studies, offering new interdisciplinary connections between structures of thought underscored by a passionate political impulse. However, the question, at the end of this volume, remains; how can we move beyond a limited — and admittedly cerebral — audience's *imagined* political alternatives and into actual, tangible, accessible, and inclusive change? •

BRECHT AND TRAGEDY RADICALISM, TRADITIONALISM, ERISTICS

MARTIN REVERMANN

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review by

SILVIJA JESTROVIC

University of Warwick, UK



Martin Revermann

Brecht and Tragedy

Radicalism, Traditionalism, Eristics

Martin

Revermann's new book *Brecht and Tragedy: Radicalism, Traditionalism, Eristics* revisits Bertolt Brecht's adaptations and negotiations of the Greek tragic idiom, arguing that the innovations, including some of the bard's most famous strategies such as the notion of *Verfremdung* — making the familiar strange — do not so much come from the avant-garde to which he very much belonged, but from deep dramatic tradition. Revermann is the scholar of Classics whose writings on Greek tragedians and Aristophanes have made the world of Ancient Greek theatre come alive. In his study of Brecht's utilisation of tragedy, Revermann again brings a fresh perspective, this time to the reading of Brecht, successfully navigating the intersections of theatre and performance studies with that of Classics.

Revermann does not attempt to deprive Brecht of his role in shaping radical avant-garde tendencies, but rather points out that Brecht's radicalism could not be fully understood without his traditionalism. To explore this paradoxical duality, he zooms in on a particular moment in Brecht's opus; his ground-breaking 1948 translation/adaptation *The Antigone of Sophocles* that also served as a basis for his first model book the *Antigonemodell* published in 1949. Revermann's book deploys a double lens interpreting Brecht's adaptations and dramaturgy through the tragic idiom, while simultaneously offering an innovative reading of the Classics through Brecht — through both perspectives the familiar routes of scholarly interpretation have been made strange.

Greek tragedy is not only seen here as a dramaturgical intersection of radicalism and tradition, but also as an important conceptual framework that allows for a genealogical exploration of Brecht's negotiations of the tragic idiom. In the opening chapter, Revermann demonstrates how Brecht's point about Aristotelian tragedy as a realm of unalterable faith — of no true human agency — is not so much rooted in Aristotle's *Poetics*, but rather in German idealism, the works of Schiller and Jessner's famous 1929 staging of *Oedipus*. In the first part of the book, entitled 'Point of Contact 1948', Revermann uses Brecht's notion of non-Aristotelian theatre — the paradigmatic backdrop in opposition to which the dramatist situates his work — to understand the genealogy of Brecht's reworking of the tragic idiom. He foregrounds the point that Brecht's non-Aristotelian theatre does not refer merely to Aristotle's *Poetics*, but that it lumps together various forms of tragedy and the tragic, as Brecht positions his work against the backdrop of the Western canon.

The second part of the book, 'Positionings', explores the genealogy of Brechtian tragic idiom while contextualising his work within a wider artistic topography of other 'classic' traditions, including Asian theatre, Shakespeare, Schiller, and Naturalism. However, this part also explores Brecht's tragic idiom in relation to comedy. The final part, 'Comparatist Explorations', uses analogy as a hermeneutical tool to interrogate genealogical connections to tragedy in Brecht's wider opus, including elements of tragedy in *Mother Courage*, 'the view from below' in *The Threepenny Opera*, *The Good Person of Szechwan* as a form of anti-tragedy, and *Life of Galileo* as involving a tragic hero. This approach allows for consideration of a wider thematic scope and of the ways in which Brecht's work engages with issues of gender and motherhood, ritual and sacrifice, heroism and justice, divinity and parody.

The book also makes an argument for a comparative and interdisciplinary study of Brecht and tragedy, foregrounding the pressure of the

dramatist to re-invent the tragic form so that it is able to speak to contemporary socio-political complexities in relevant, provocative and at the same time entertaining ways. Hence, the material itself, shaped through its intertextual and intertheatrical links and webs, invites a comparatist approach. Through such approach, Revermann hopes to de-automatise superfluous invocations of Brechtian theatre and invite a deeper, more complex, engagement with this legacy. The other goal of this study is to re-poeticise Brecht by exploring various dimensions of his art form — from the intertextual and metatheatrical to the materiality and craft of theatre making. This is, however, by no means an attempt to depoliticise Brecht by reducing the analysis to the aesthetic and formal dimensions of his work, but rather to foreground the inextricable link between aesthetics and politics, showing — as the Russian Formalist scholar Victor Shklovsky (who, like Brecht, was interested in the capacity of art to make the familiar strange) pointed out — that form is content.

This is a valuable, erudite, and inspiring study of Brecht and tragedy that does not so much dispel the idea of Brecht as avant-garde innovator but confirms what Brecht himself pointed out in the spirit of a true radical traditionalist (the paradox that Revermann also highlights): ‘Methods become exhausted; stimuli no longer work. New problems appear and demand new methods. Reality changes, in order to represent it, modes of representation must also change. Nothing comes from nothing; the new comes from the old, but that is why it is new’ (Brecht 1977: 82). This point could be understood as describing a dialectical process — the concept of dialectics being especially pertinent and well-studied in regard to Brecht. Revermann offers another term, which is also in the book’s title, ‘eristics’, arguing that the term has a capacity to illuminate the specific nature of Brecht’s polemical attitude to the Greeks and aspirations as a dramatist. Turning to the etymology of the word, Revermann demonstrates its inherent duality — linking both to the

words ‘eros’ denoting ‘desire’ and ‘eris’ meaning ‘strife’. Hence, Brecht’s strife with the Greeks has an uncanny double in his desire to reinvent the big form to speak to the big issues. In that sense, eristics is viewed as linked to the dialectics of Brecht’s modes of representation and reception whereby ‘the new comes from the old’ and ‘that is why it is new’.

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TEMPO PERSO
DANZA E COREOGRAFIA
DELLO STARE FERMI

LOST TIME

DANCE AND CHOREOGRAPHY OF STILLNESS

STEFANO TOMASSINI

Milano: Scalpendi editore, 2020, 144 pp.

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review by

MARTA KELLER

Institute of the Arts Barcelona, Spain

Stefano Tomassini

TEMPO PERSO

DANZA E COREOGRAFIA DELLO STARE FERMI



Stefano

Tomassini's *Tempo perso* presents a poetic approach to his study about stillness in dance considered as a political statement. Attention is focused on how immobility is choreographed to strike the observer and how this apparent nothing permits the reading of the powerful decision behind it, similarly as, throughout history, a 'sit-in' has been sometimes considered more effective than a protest march. The essay considers a wide number of examples of sit-ins performed in the modern dance field, under diverse circumstances. Some pages are entirely dedicated to photographs, capturing a variety of extents of movement from some of the main art works supporting this study.

The text is structured into an introduction and three chapters composing the body; these are in turn divided into sections titled by quotations or allusions referring to the dance pieces analysed. The choice of naming the first section of the introduction 'Capolinea', which is to say 'Terminus'¹ suggesting the idea of an ending point as motionless as death and ruins, could be considered subversive. Together with the last segment of the concluding chapter, called 'Remembrance of the Future', these two titles somehow deconstruct the common linear perception of time, preparing the reader for an experience out of the ordinary. The first series of quotes is also an invitation to alternative views on the notion of time and movement, immediately donating the image of an absence of movement that implies an invisible charge of energy: a hibernation during which it seems like nothing is happening, meanwhile the whole system is at work to gather necessary forces for the imminent awakening.

1. All translations are by the author.

The author seeks to investigate the underground movement. He is keen to understand what comes before and beyond the image of an immobile dancer, examining the choice to display stillness while there still is an ongoing blood flow, neural activity, air exchange, and cellular motion in action; lively fretting in the core of that body, silently burning like lava. The latter being a very dear theme to the quoted choreographer Roberto Zappalà, among the many other internationally known artists Tomassini refers to throughout all chapters. In fact, each one opens with a list of the main dance works that are going to be analysed within. It follows a collection of quotes, which sensitively bring the reader into specific moods and atmospheres, in order to establish the subsequent themes. The pieces of art are wisely compared in their revolutionary visions and arrangements to corresponding rule-breaking messages of innovation in other fields, varying among literature, philosophy, music, architecture, economics; all of these matters are treated with knowledge of specific and technical language. On the other hand, the author prioritises a poetic style to the full respect of syntax and, at times, his lyrical form results in obscure semantics.

The introduction is based on reconsidering the concepts of dust, emptiness, left-overs, recognising their unavoidable existence, therefore their undeniable necessity and value. All of the unseen movement intrinsic in everything in this Universe might be invisible but still vital for progress, the same way as the whole busy motion backstage is fundamental for the show to succeed, even though the audience does not witness it nor directly praise it. The stance of the dancers in the wings is powerfully named 'the reverse of the pose' (p. 13) on the grounds that they are protected from the view of the spectator hence they perform the wait within a range of movements that totally differ from those shown at the same time on stage just few steps away. In this emblematic image, the energy of immobility becomes infinite potentiality of movement, as observed in modernist dance (p. 15), which develops together with humans' evolution in the direction of the need to find individuality and a personal pace.

In the first pages, already a vast selection of various sources can be appreciated, even though the reasons whether texts are quoted in original language or not, and whether a translation is produced at all, are often unclear, leaving a sense of incoherency in addition to lack of precision in specifying where the presented translations are coming from. However, the introduction is thematically relevant in contemporary social studies. The modern human being can hardly recognise the importance of stillness and its unavoidable role in life: still and slow are boring, in a world where news, information, and pastimes are offered at finger-tapping speed. The average human is not patient enough and not attentive enough (Burkeman 2015: para. 4) to take a closer look and perceive the multiple things happening inside the stillness of a tree trunk, even though each and every tiny thing in there is essential for the very same human existence. The whole process of redemption of the concept of ruin, refusing the rhythms of modernity, is extended throughout the second chapter to the conception of death, particularly with the examination of *Requiem pour L.* (p. 94).

The body of the text initially deals with the inseparability of the space-time system, focusing on revolutionary management of space in choreography and on the distortion of the audience's perception of time given by the combination of innovative geometry and stillness. The new dimension proposed by postmodern urban architecture and its evolution allows dancers into unexplored limits. Tomassini takes into account specifically the influence of this renewal on the blind spots of society, where the rebellion against conformity is alive (p. 57), and focuses on artists who take advantage of their power of expressing socio-economic models and community by means of space-time warp through placement, '*adynamia*' (p. 84). Breaking the rules of what is expected from a dance piece, the planned inactivity stands for aesthetic political resistance to homogenisation, as well as strategy to rethink chronological time against the worship of profit (p. 87). Particularly the works investigated

in the last chapter are strongly supportive of researching an individuality that correlates with coexistence and brotherhood, inviting the viewer to fight for sexual independency in order to become free critical thinkers entitled to personal political choices.

In general, the book encourages the reader to notice the many ways for a small detail, expressed through strong imposition of the unusual and the unexpected, to make a big difference and become meaningful in a world invaded by a great fuss of movement. The study presents multiple choreographies from modern dance history and the way in which they manipulate the spectator's perception of space and time, in order to bring to the surface questions and doubts about borders, linearity of time, individual choices, and freedom. Examinations of the art works seek to reconsider concepts such as mistake or defeat, the acceptance of death and weaknesses, and the liberation of exposing emotions and bodies in contrast to some extent of warning from the excess of rationality.

Viewing the choice of stillness in dance as a form of political rebellion, an additional inspection can be considered on the correlation with the spectator deciding to go and sit (or stand) to watch the performance. The dancer expresses an assertion, the value of which only exists in presence of someone being influenced by it, as Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre completes its function by leaving the audience saying 'That's great art; nothing obvious in it' (Brecht 1964: 71). The witnesses of the act with their will to participate in the performative event ensure the opening of a communicative channel, which at first sight might seem unilateral, whereas it creates the sparkle for a multi-dimensional motion of reward, comments, suggestions, new ideas, inspiration.

Concluding, if critics in the 1990s assumed 'the choices of immobility [...] as fatal consequences of reduced motor skills' (p. 30), Tomassini allows for the readaption of that vision: firstly, he demonstrates that

a choice that appears to be meaningless or simple can conceal strong reasons and challenges; secondly, he suggests that immobility is rich of infinite motion, as well as emptiness nowadays doesn't imply absence as it is 'by no means a simple empty space' (Ray 1991: 205). •

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**UMA CURADORIA
DA FALTA
O SERVIÇO ACARTE
DA FUNDAÇÃO
CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN
1984-1989**

**A CURATORSHIP OF LACK
THE ACARTE DEPARTMENT OF THE
CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN FOUNDATION 1984-1989**

ANA BIGOTTE VIEIRA

Lisboa: Sistema Solar, 2021, 246 pp.
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review by

FRANCESCA RAYNER

Universidade do Minho, Portugal

ANA BIGOTTE VIEIRA

UMA
CURADORIA

UMA CURADORIA
DA FALTA

O SERVIÇO ACARTE
DA FUNDAÇÃO
CALOUSTE
GULBENKIAN
1984 - 1989

DA FALTA
1984-1989

The 1980s

in Portugal are something of a forgotten decade in artistic and critical terms. Located between the post-revolutionary 1970s and the globalised, mediatised 1990s, they have tended to be viewed either as not political enough compared to the 1970s or not international enough compared to the 1990s. Critical writing in the performing arts has also rarely focused on the history of cultural institutions, preferring to concentrate instead on biographies of key individuals or histories of significant companies. For both these reasons, Ana Bigotte Vieira's detailed account of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's ACARTE department from the mid-1980s to the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall is a welcome addition to the historiography of Portuguese performance.

The ACARTE (Animation, Artistic Creation, and Education for Art) department, under the visionary leadership of Madalena de Azeredo Perdigão, was established in 1984 and came to an end in 2002. Perdigão died in 1989, which helps to explain why this volume ends in this year, for she was a fundamental figure in shaping the objectives of the organisation. However, unlike many cultural institutions, ACARTE did not end because it had failed or run out of steam, but because it was considered to have achieved its aims and to have become a model for other cultural institutions in Portugal. This gives a sense of the importance of the organisation and, in particular, of the *Encontros ACARTE* (ACARTE international festivals or cycles) which began in 1987 and became regular features of the Service's work. These events brought to Portugal such important figures as Pina Bausch, Tadeusz Kantor, and Jan Fabre. They created a greater awareness of what was happening in

European culture and the specific contribution of Portuguese artists to that culture. As the book makes clear in a chapter dedicated to the *Nova Dança Portuguesa* (New Portuguese Dance) movement, this movement was very much a creation of ACARTE's regular new dance/theatre programming. It brought to Portugal work by choreographers such as Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker and promoted new Portuguese choreographers such as Francisco Camacho and Vera Mantero. The internationalisation of Portuguese contemporary dance and performance would quite simply not have occurred without this continued support from ACARTE.

Bigotte Vieira adopts a prismatic approach to the Department that observes its work from different angles. The introductory chapter emphasises the multiple temporalities and geographies that intersect in the work of ACARTE, combining elements of the education for art movement of the 1970s, the incipient entrepreneurship of the 1980s, and the European focus of the 1990s. Then follows an analysis of the social, political, and artistic changes ushered in during the 1980s in Portugal, including (post)modern biopolitics, the extension of capitalist consumerism, and political integration into the European Economic Community in 1986. There are also chapters on the legacy of the forty-eight-year Portuguese dictatorship (1926–1974) in Portuguese cultural life as well as a chapter on the architecture of the buildings in which the Service was located, which included a separate pavilion for work with children.

The specific chapters on the work of the Department include a year-by-year account of their varied and often interdisciplinary work and an analysis of their overall objectives that Bigotte Vieira frames in terms of a curatorship of lack. This notion of lack is taken from the work of Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito (2010) and applied here to discuss the ways in which ACARTE defined itself as much by what it was not going to do as what it aimed to do, by what was not yet present or was no longer present. Crucially, ACARTE did not aim to fill the supposed lack

of Portugal's 'backwardness', 'semi-peripheral' economic and cultural status, and years of political insularity, but to foreground and explore the contours of this lack in a radical attempt to be simultaneously local, national, and European. Indeed, in an intriguing comment which is not developed further, Bigotte Vieira suggests the possible resignification of pejorative terms like 'backwardness' and 'periphery' which imply only one linear model of cultural progress. She replaces them with terms such as 'motor', 'advantage', or simply 'condition' (p. 74) which emphasize the historical and geographical construction of notions of culture and do not reinforce geo-political hierarchies between supposedly advanced and backward nations.

The volume details clearly the effects of the performative turn during this period and applies the lens of the more recent transition from notions of programming to notions of curatorship to the work of the Department. The performative and discursive characteristics of the Service's work are foregrounded in the programme statements for specific events and in the curatorial framing of the different artistic cycles. Archive documents and photographs aid the reader in bringing to life the work of the Service. The volume also illustrates how controversies over ACARTE invitations and events revealed, for instance, the growing importance of visual and dance theatre over text-based theatre during this period. Occasionally, the structure of the chapters is confusing. The Section on the Architecture of Culture, for instance, moves from a discussion of cultural politics to the legacy of the dictatorship to a discussion of the construction of the Modern Art Museum (Centro de Arte Moderna, CAM) in a way that does not link these different developments. Yet the book in general is an important guide to a highly influential department. It illustrates how, despite being located within a private institution, ACARTE became a model for public artistic institutions in its attempt to make art part of the commons, all the way from childhood to adulthood. ●

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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